

STATE of the PARK

Annual Friends Meeting 2024

Aaron Wunrow – Park Manager

Heather Funk – Visitor Services Coordinator

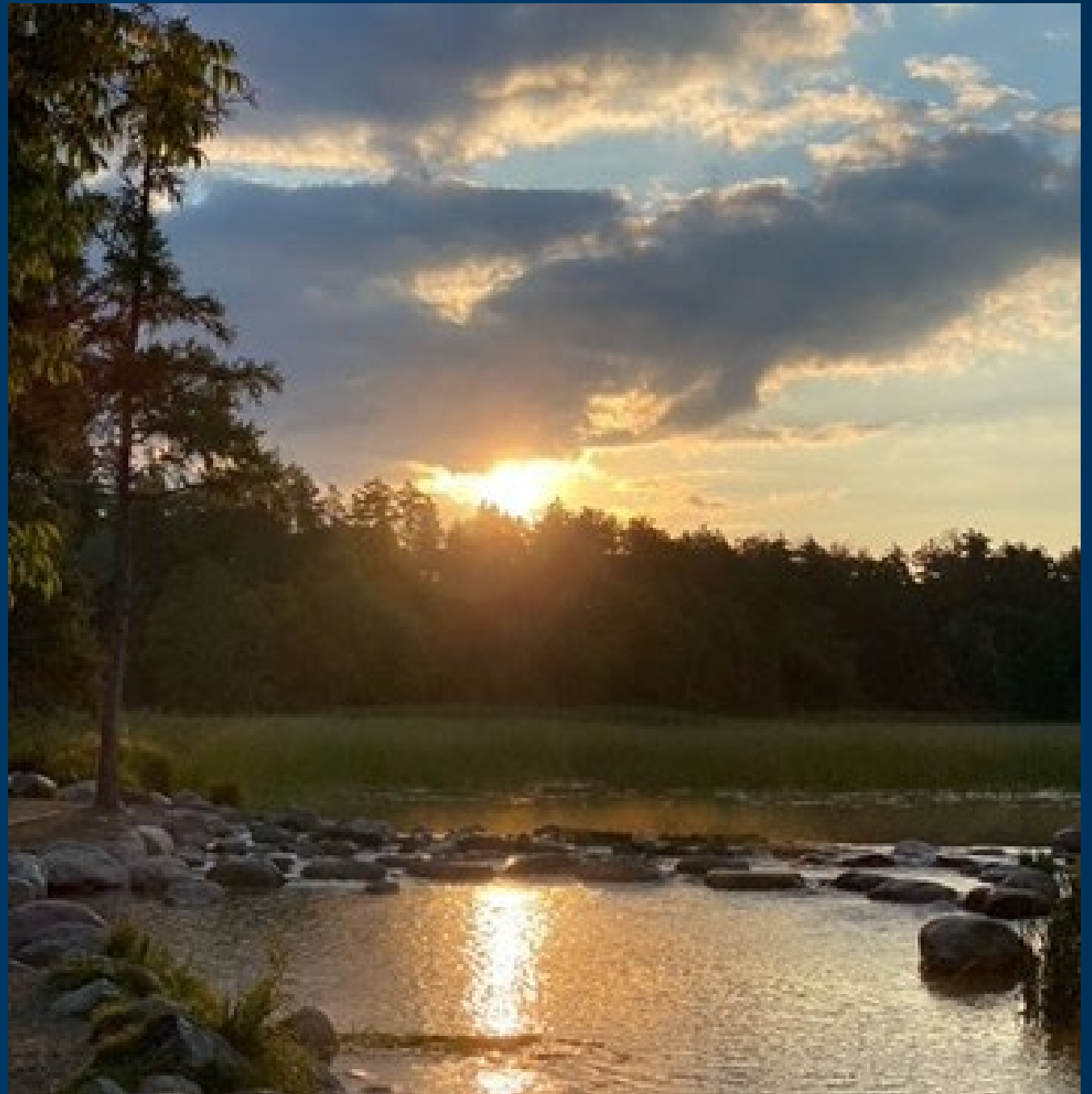
Itasca State Park

and LaSalle State Recreation Area

and Forestry Campgrounds Huntersville, Shell City Landing, Shell City Horse, Gulch,
Mantrap and Hungryman

Itasca – the rest of the story....

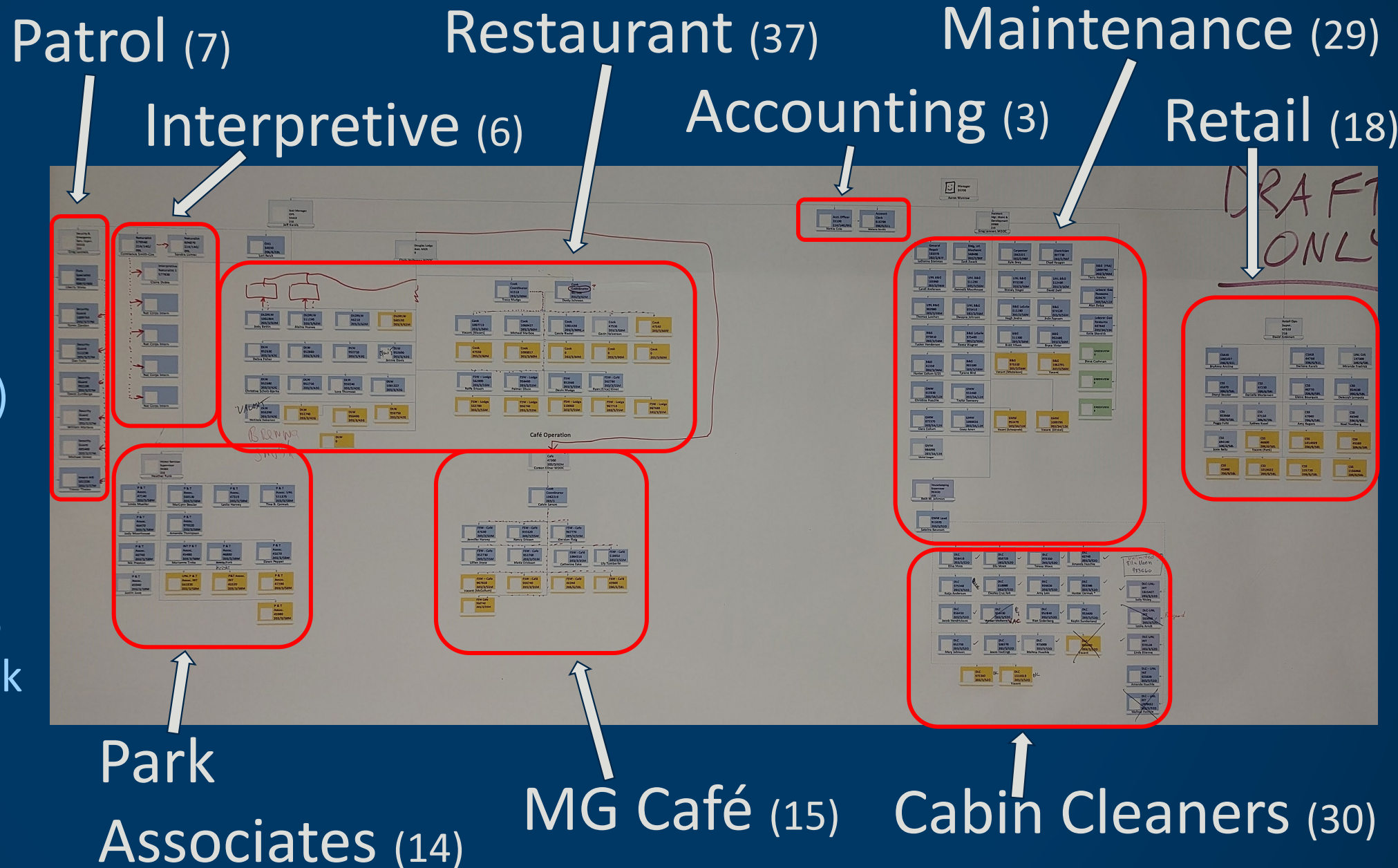
- A behind the scenes look at Itasca operations and staffing
- Project Updates
- New Initiatives





Itasca Staff Organizational Chart

- Over 160 Staff
(15% of entire
State Park
Statewide Staff)
- Nine Sections,
ten supervisors
- ALL CRITICAL to
getting our work
accomplished!!



Itasca Lead Staff

Park Manager - 169
Aaron Wunrow

**Accounting
Section - 3**
Emily McDougall

**Operations/Dev't.
Section Assistant
Manager - 62**
Greg Lanners

**Visitor Services
Section Assistant
Manager - 101**
Jeff Karels

**Visitor Services
Coordinator - 1**
Heather Funk

**Retail
Team - 18**
Dave Zothman
BriAnna Anstine
George Karels

**Maintenance
Team - 29**
Ashley Pugh
Wade Foy

**Housekeeping
Team - 30**
Beth Johnson
Mel Norgaard

**Resource
Team - 2**

**PA/Patrol
Team - 22**
Nettie Cole

**Food Service
Team - 53**
Cyndi Holleman

**Naturalist
Team - 7**
Connie Cox
Sandra Lichter

KEY

- # STAFF in Section
SUPERVISOR - 10
LEADS - 14

**Park Associate
Unit - 14**
Tina Brandenburg-Cermak

**Park Patrol
Unit - 7**
Liberty Weiss

**Douglas Lodge
Restaurant - 37**
Tracy Mudge
Mike Malboe
Alaina Huewa
Jody Bettin

**Mary Gibbs
Café - 15**
Cassie Puschinsky
Calvin Larson

Food Service Itasca State Park

Douglas Lodge Restaurant and Mary Gibbs Cafe



Cabin Cleaners

68 rooms, suites and cabins with full-service cabin cleaning offers visitors a truly unique lodging experience in a rustic setting.



Retail Gift Stores Itasca State Park

Three Gift Stores

-Mary Gibbs

-Forest Inn

-Jacob Brower Visitor Center



Patrol and Emergency Response

Park Rangers are trained Emergency Medical Responders and routinely respond to visitor accidents and injuries including directing medical air evacuations.



Interpretive Naturalists

Six interpretive naturalists including two year-round staff, one seasonal naturalist and three interns provide educational programming and exhibit design for visitors.



Park Associate Team Itasca State Park

Public Contact Team

Park Associates welcome visitors providing information, selling vehicle permits and registering campers.



Maintenance and Cleaning Teams

Itasca State Park

Maintenance staff are responsible for all grounds maintenance, trail work, public bathroom cleaning, garbage collection, building maintenance, etc. etc.



Accounting Office

- Accounting staff directly process over \$1.5 M (approximately 1/4 of the Park's overall \$6M annual revenue).
- They also are involved with every purchase that occurs.





La Salle Lake State Recreation Area

- Minnesota's deepest inland lake at 213-feet
- 39 campsites with full water/sewer hookups
- 2 cabins
- Nature Play Area



Forest Recreation Areas

- Huntersville FRA
- Shell City Landing FRA
- Shell City Equestrian FRA
- Hungryman FRA
- The Gulch FRA
- Mantrap FRA



Cool Things in 2024 !

- Itasca Boat Access
- North Entrance
- Bear Proof Garbage Receptacles
- Bert's Bike Trail Extension
- Heartland Trail Extension – Hwy 71 Tunnel
- New Warehouse and Laundry Facilities
- Bear Paw Campground Dump Station
- Conservation Corp Crews
- Wilderness Drive & Maadaadizi Trail Interpretive Trail Signs
- Playground Project
- Archiving Project
- New Visitor Center Theater Video
- Accessible Track Chair

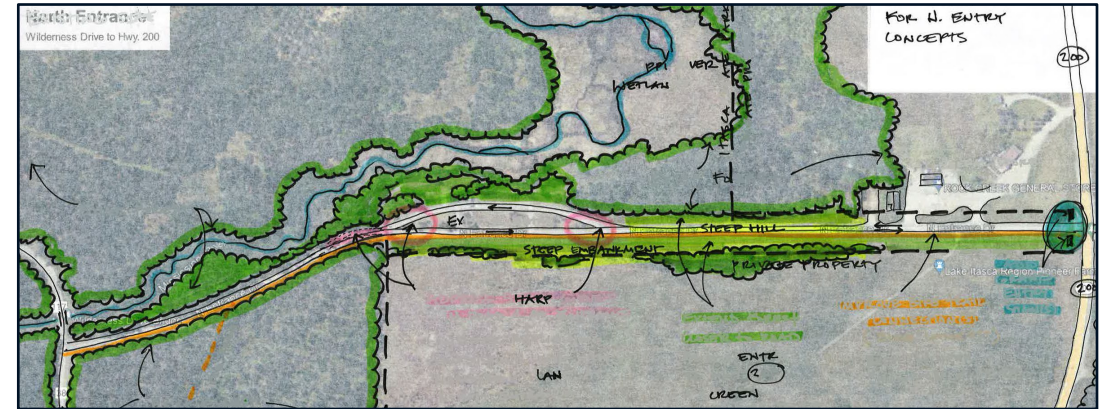
Lake Itasca Boat Access

- Paved and added designated parking for boat trailers, and bike/boat rental, and AIS inspection.
- NEW double drive-in access
- Existing access converted to carry-in access
- New accessible kayak and canoe launch
- Fully accessible flush toilet building!! and fish cleaning building
- Grand Opening Spring 2025



North Entrance

- Approximately 1/3 of our visitors (nearly 200,000 people) come in the North Entrance.
- Visitor orientation and traffic flow improvements are desperately needed!
- Project will bring in technology options, Wi/FI, visitor information, and registration improvements.
- Traffic flow and design changes will be incorporated.
- PLEASE share your ideas!



Bear Proof Garbage Receptacles

- Bear proof dumpsters
- Bear proof garbage/recycling cans
- Bear proof food storage lockers for all walk-in and backpack sites
- Significant decrease in bear reports in campgrounds!



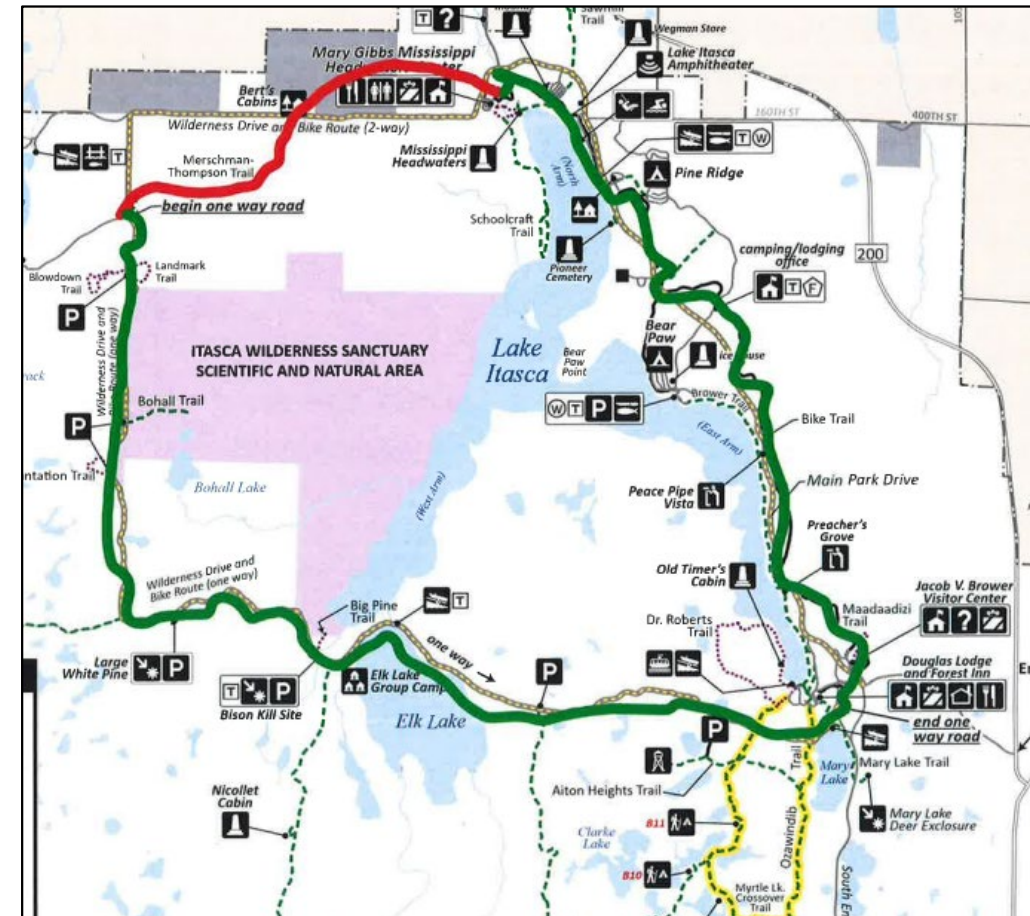
From this...



To this !!

Bert's Bike Trail Extension

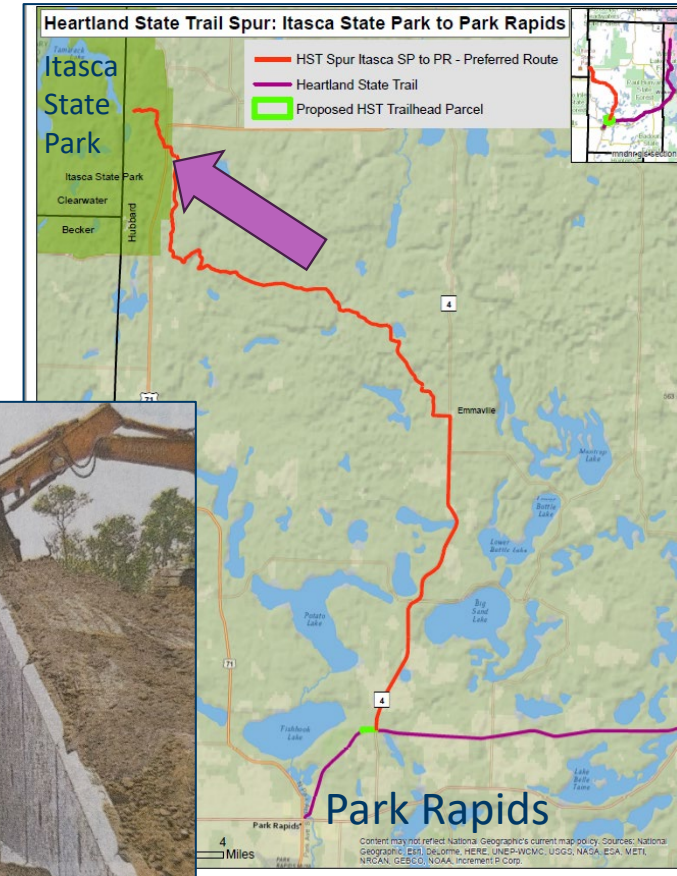
- Paved three-mile extension now connects Mary Gibbs Center with Wilderness Drive.
- Eliminates safety issue of biking on two-way portion of Wilderness Drive.



Heartland Trail Extension – Hwy 71 Tunnel

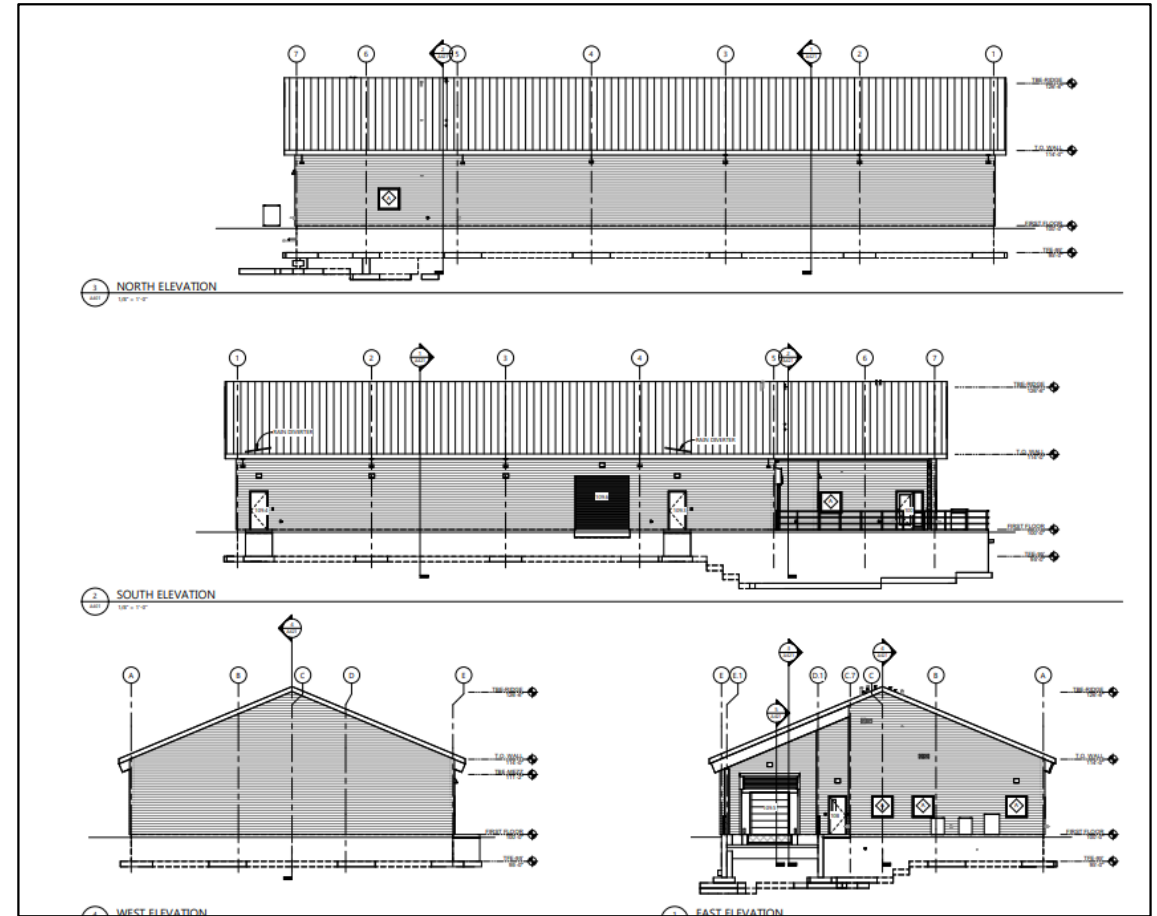
Itasca Spur

- Eventually connect Heartland State Trail from Park Rapids to Itasca (orange line)
- Tunnel complete
- Connection to Itasca Trails Fall 2024/2025
- Next trail segment to Emmaville is partially funded.



New Retail Warehouse and Laundry Facilities

- Retail Warehouse is designed to meet today and future retail storage and processing needs.
- Construction may begin later this year.
- Current Retail Warehouse will be converted to Laundry facility
- Laundry will office cabin cleaning staff and provide for lodging laundry needs when needed.



Bear Paw Campground Water and Wastewater Project

- Repaired aging infrastructure!
- Dump Station make over now accommodates two-way traffic (doubled current capacity!)
- Campground Host now has full electric, water and sewer hookups.



Conservation Corp Crews Here this Summer

- Conservation Corp Minnesota/Iowa (CCMI)
 - Peace Pipe Vista steps
 - Opened views to Lake Itasca at Amphitheater
- Northern Bedrocks Conservation Corp
 - South Entrance log restoration
 - East Entrance monument work
 - Pioneer Cemetery work



Wilderness Drive & Maadaadizi Interpretive Trail Signs

- Over 60 completely new interpretive signs on Wilderness Drive Trails and Maadaadize Trail!!
- New Wilderness Drive interpretive trail names such as Changing Forest Trail and Ancient Bison Trail.



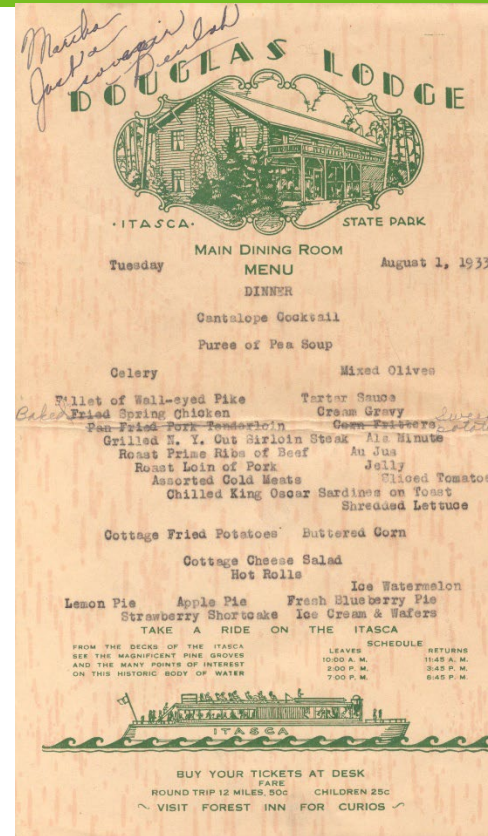
Playground Project

- Friends of Itasca are sponsoring the rehab and accessibility improvements!!
- Archaeological report from MHS just went to SHPO for final review in August.

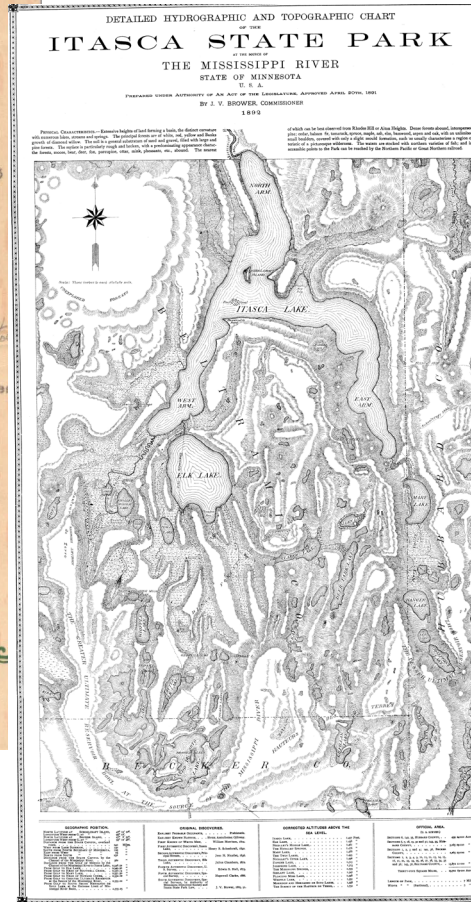


Archiving Project

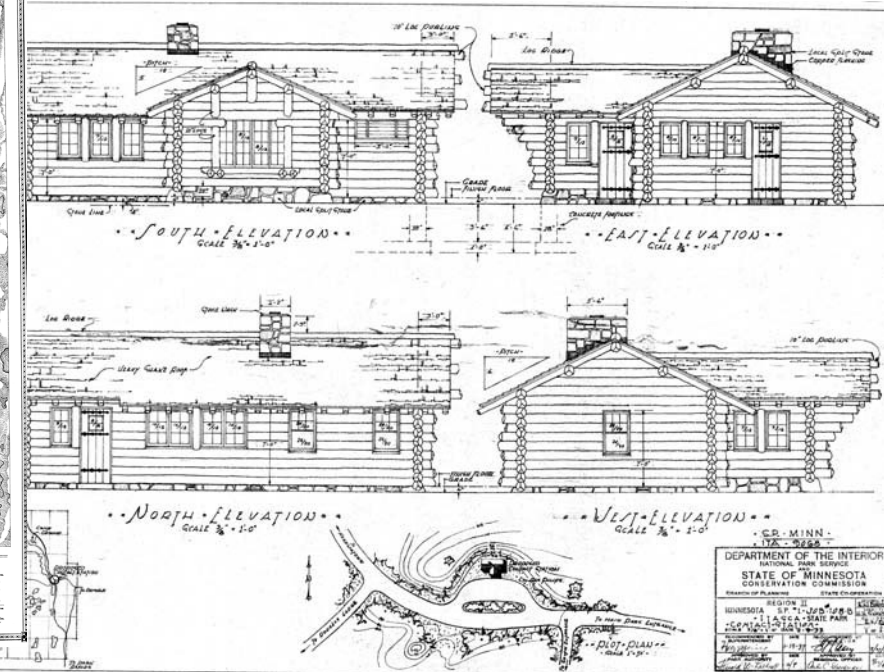
- Funding for 3 staff this past winter to
 - archive, digitize and accession the myriad of historic documents, papers, photos, blueprints, maps in a searchable and retrievable format



1933 Douglas Lodge Menu



1892 Brower Park Map



Cabin 16 Old East Contact Station

New Visitor Center Theater Video

- Actively working on updating the dated Visitor Center Orientation video
- Video to be shot through the 2024 – 2025 seasons
- *“You can write your Itasca story in any season”*



Accessible Track Chairs

- New tracked chair—reservable and can be used on all trails.
- Wheeled motorized trail
- Both located at located at Mary Gibbs



Grandma was very excited to be the first person to use the park's brand new all terrain wheelchair

Visitor Facebook Post

Generations of Memories

Betty (Sorenson) Schleske wrote a letter in her 90's sharing how she visited Itasca as a young girl (photo on the right) and has returned with her family for decades creating a lifetime of memories!



From Douglas Lodge guest book: "I caught an 8# 12 oz. wall-eyed pike in Mary's Lake." Betty Sorenson. "Betty (Sorenson) Schleske returned to Itasca in 1994 and donated this photo after seeing her guest book question posed in a park exhibit."



THANK YOU!!